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SUBJECT: Attack on Labor Activist - Consul General Expresses U.S. Concern to Guangdong Provincial Officials

REF: A) 07 GUANGZHOU 1268, B) GUANGZHOU 26

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: At the request of Embassy Beijing, the Consul General Goldberg formally expressed U.S. concern about the physical attack on Huang Qingnan, the Director of Dongzhe Work Safety and Health Center, to Guangdong provincial officials. He urged them to look into Huang's case as well as into the cases of others who have similarly been abused, threatened or attacked while working on behalf of China's workers. Guangdong Foreign Affairs Office Director General Fu Lang contended that local authorities had taken prompt action and expressed the Guangdong Government's commitment to protecting workers' rights. He argued that the province's large migrant population made law enforcement difficult. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Consul General coupled his formal expression of concern about the specific case of labor activist Huang Qingnan with an observation that such attacks on those who are in fact promoting China's rule of law and building a harmonious society efforts through assistance to the most disadvantaged had in fact increased. (Note: As reported ref A, Huang was attacked on November 20 by knife-wielding thugs -- the latest in a series of escalating attacks aimed at closing the NGO he runs. End note.) He noted that it was essential for Guangdong's police and legal system to protect organizations and individuals at increased risk of victimization. The Consul General urged provincial officials to look into the case and asked for future updates on its status.

¶3. (SBU) Fu, who had been well briefed on the facts of the case, expressed sympathy for Huang but contended that local police had taken prompt action. He argued that undertaking an effective investigation had taken time, emphasizing that police had eventually arrested the man who orchestrated the attack. Fu explained that investigations had concluded that the main suspect had arranged the attack because he believed that Huang's activities had cut into his business profits. Fu also said that officials from the local Civil Affairs Bureau and Trade Unions Federation had visited Huang to express their sympathy and assure that he received proper treatment.

¶4. (SBU) The Guangdong Government, its law enforcement agencies and criminal justice system are committed to protecting labor rights and punishing criminal activity that threatens those rights, Fu said. He cited the new Labor Law, effective January 1, as evidence of the high priority the Chinese Government places on the rights and interests of workers, especially migrant workers.

¶5. (SBU) Pointing out that nearly 20 million migrants live in Guangdong province, Fu said the huge transient population made it difficult for law enforcement agencies to maintain public security.

He commented that many violent cases like the attack on Huang take place every day. He acknowledged that the local public security situation remains unsatisfactory despite constant effort by local police, but suggested that China was in a period of transition in terms of labor issues and we would really only be able to judge success as China moved toward better enforcement of labor rights.

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